



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Back to Seattle from a successful 3-month skirmish with the elusive giant King crab of the Arctic Bering Sea have come the floating cannery Tondeleyo and the fishing boat Dorothy, two of three sent north in September on a pioneering deep sea adventure by the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior.

Congress authorized the expedition for scientific and experimental commercial purposes. Sale of the canned product when made will be by public auction and the proceeds turned over to the United States Treasury. Chief purpose of the 3-vessel venture, according to the Service, is "to encourage the development of an American crab meat industry by obtaining practical information on production costs, and scientific data on areas where Alaska King crab abound, determining the most efficient and economical methods for catching and packing them."

Staffed by 40 scientists, economists, and experts in the craft of fishing, the expedition worked the waters south of the Alaskan Peninsula this fall. Primarily, data were sought on seasonal migration of these crabs, their habitat and habits, and proper methods of capture and pack.

Leaving Seattle August 28, the vessels started their survey from Pavlof Bay, proceeded west to Ikatan Bay, thence returning along the coast to the Shumagin Islands. Waters to the east near Kodiak and in the Shelikof Straits also were dragged with otter trawls, some tangle nets, and crab pots to obtain specimens.

"It is too early to say what the prospects in the Gulf of Alaska will be," said Dr. Waldo L. Schmitt, Curator of Marine Invertebrates of the National Museum in Washington, who is scientific head of the expedition. "At this time of year, King crabs are not present in commercial abundance in the area surveyed. It is known that their fields run from the Alaska Peninsula to Southeastern Alaska and extend in increasing quantities up to the Bering Sea. In the latter area is where they should be found in greatest numbers."

After re-outfitting during the Christmas season, the venture will again sail for northern waters, as soon as weather permits, to continue exploratory operations north of the Aleutians and Alaska Peninsula.

Leroy S. Christey, formerly statistical and marketing agent for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Division of Fishery Industries, is the chief economist of the entire venture. He will report upon all economic and competitive phases of the study. Other experts have gone along to report on the best types of fishing gear for catching the giant crabs, canning methods, and utilization of shells and waste as by-products. Meteorological data also are being gathered for the United States Weather Bureau.

A sample of the first pack landed on Alaska before the return of the fleet was sent to Washington recently which was tested in the food laboratories of the Service by representatives of wholesale food distributors. They were asked to report to the Government department their opinions on the quality of the product, how well it was packed, whether it retained its color, its flavor, and how well it had been cleaned. Details for its wholesale and retail distribution will not be decided until after the expedition returns next year with the principal portion of the catch.

For many years, this country has been an important user of canned crab meat. Importation has come mainly from Japan, whose fishermen have been taking King crabs from Alaskan and Japanese waters on a large scale for better than 10 years, while American fishermen have virtually ignored this important resource in their own waters. In 1939, the United States purchased over 3-3/4 million dollars worth of the Japanese exports, or about half their total production; and, up to October 1940, we had purchased over 3 million dollars worth. This compares with total United States imports of canned crab meat last year of about 4-1/2 million dollars.

The sporadic attempts by American industry to develop this fishery in the past have been unseccessful. This, Service scientists explain, has been due mainly to lack of information concerning the best fishing areas and any knowledge of a catching and packing technique. If the present venture proves successful, private firms in the United States may be encouraged to enter this fishery.

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